



Committee and Date

Council
26 September 2024

Item

Public



Member Attendance at Conferences, Training and other External Events

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Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Lezley Picton, Leader		

1. Synopsis

This report aims to update the position for members wishing to attend external events in the light of the severe budgetary constraints facing the council. Approval is sought for Part 5 of the Constitution: ‘Protocol: Member Attendance at Conferences, Training and other External Events’ to be updated accordingly.

2. Executive Summary

The list of events for which member attendance is approved within the constitution requires updating. It is out of date, includes events which we no longer recognise, and the Council no longer has a separate budget for fees for attending external events or accommodation or expense claims connected to attendance at them.

3. Recommendations

That Council approves:

3.1 That the existing ‘Protocol for Members Attendance at Conferences and Training Events’ be replaced with a ‘Protocol for Member Attendance at Conferences, Training and other External Events’, as set out in the appendix to this report, to be implemented until the financial position of the Council improves.

3.2 Given their strategic importance, Member attendance at the LGA Annual Conference and CCN Conference continue to be supported for a maximum of 2 members at each event, with the fee for attendance, travel expenses and accommodation (if necessary) met by the Council.

3.3 Attendance at other conferences, training events, seminars, meetings or external events will only be approved in the most exceptional circumstances by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and relevant Group Leader, with the fee for attendance, travel expenses and accommodation (where necessary) met by the Council.

3.4 The funding of fees for any event attended by Members will be contingent on the preparation of a brief report within one month to be circulated to the relevant scrutiny committee membership and group leaders. This will outline the learning and feedback gained from attendance.

3.5 Attendance at free events both online and in person is encouraged, but if in person and there are travel costs or accommodation involved, members will need to seek approval from the Chief Executive (by emailing democracy@shropshire.gov.uk) in accordance with Paragraph 3.3

3.6 In the case of any event (free or otherwise), where a cancellation charge is made due to non-attendance or cancellation after a deadline date, this will not be met by the Council, but will be the responsibility of the member who failed to provide notification and will be deducted from their monthly allowance, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

3.7 Attendance at party political conferences are excluded from the protocol and all expenses associated with attendance at these events will be met by the relevant political group or the individual member concerned.

Report

4 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

The changes proposed will support the financial position of the council but will impact on the objectives of 'Healthy Organisation' and 'Strong Councillors' in the Shropshire Plan. Attendance at external events brings insight into best practice and innovation, the national and regional situation, new legislation and provides useful networking opportunities with other councils

5 Financial Implications

Shropshire Council is currently managing an unprecedented financial position as budgeted for with the Medium Term Financial Strategy approved by Council on 29 February 2024 and detailed in our monitoring position presented to Cabinet on a monthly basis. This demonstrates that significant management action is required over the remainder of the financial year to ensure the Council's financial survival. While all Cabinet Reports provide the financial implications of decisions being taken, this may

change as officers review the overall financial situation and make decisions aligned to financial survivability. Where non-essential spend is identified within the Council, this will be reduced. This may involve:

- scaling down initiatives,
- changing the scope,
- delaying implementation, or
- extending delivery timescales.

6 Climate Change Appraisal

There will be a small reduction in carbon emissions if members no longer or reduce travel out of county to attend events.

7 Background

Members will be aware that a Council-wide suspension on a number of activities is already in place for all staff, which includes travel outside of Shropshire. Members have already been asked in an e-mail from the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Corporate support (sent on 20 March 2024) to be mindful of any spending and to avoid, as far as possible, the need for any expenditure that is not essential to their role.

The financial situation the Council now faces necessitates a formal update to the protocol on attendance at Conferences and Training events, which in any case contains a list of conferences and seminars which is significantly out of date and includes events which no longer take place. Attendance at such events has been managed on an ad hoc basis in recent years.

The LGA Annual Conference and CCN Conferences cover the most important issues facing local government and facilitate connection and collaboration with other local authorities, business and voluntary sector contacts. It is therefore recommended that attendance at these events continues to be supported by the Council.

Throughout the year, members receive a large number of e-mails and flyers advertising external events at both a regional and national level. Attendance at free events is encouraged, but if in person, members are asked to check with democratic services that travel or accommodation expenses can be paid, who will seek authority from Chief Executive before confirming.

It is important to note that terms and conditions of registration at free events usually incurs a cancellation charge if there is non-attendance at the event or cancellation is after the deadline date. If such a charge is incurred, it is proposed that this will be the responsibility of the member who failed to provide notification and this will be deducted from their monthly allowance, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Constitution Part 5 page E138 – Protocol – Members' Attendance at Conferences and Training Events

Council Report 15 December 2011 – Conferences and Seminars

Local Member: All

Appendices: Appendix – proposed new Protocol Member Attendance at Conferences, Training and Other External Events

APPENDIX – Proposed new protocol to replace constitution part 5 page e138 – Protocol – Members Attendance at Conferences and Training Events

PROTOCOL - MEMBER ATTENDANCE AT CONFERENCES, TRAINING AND OTHER EXTERNAL EVENTS

Attendance at the following conferences has been endorsed by Full Council

Conference
LGA Annual Conference x 2 Attendance fee, travel expenses and accommodation expenses (if necessary)
CCN Annual Conference x 2 Attendance fee, travel expenses and accommodation expenses (if necessary)

Attendance at other paid for conferences, training events, seminars, meetings or external events will only be approved in the most exceptional circumstances by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and relevant Group Leader, with the fee for attendance, travel expenses and accommodation (if necessary) met by the Council. Requests to attend can be made by e-mailing democracy@shropshire.gov.uk and should outline the benefits to the Council that will be gained from attendance.

The funding for any event attended by Members will be contingent on preparation of a brief report within one month to be circulated to the relevant scrutiny committee membership and group leaders. This will outline the learning and feedback of benefit to the Council gained from attendance.

Attendance at free events is encouraged but if in person, members are asked to check via Democratic Services (democracy@shropshire.gov.uk) that travel or accommodation expenses will be met before they sign up.

In the case of free events, if a cancellation charge is made due to non-attendance or cancellation after a deadline date, *this will not be met by the Council but will be the responsibility of the member who failed to provide notification and will be deducted from their monthly allowance, unless there are extenuating circumstances.*

Attendance at party political conferences are excluded from the protocol and all expenses associated with attendance at these events will be met by the relevant group or the individual concerned.

(NB Attendance fees and travel expenses for events and training for Pensions Committee members are funded by LGPS and are outside of these arrangements.)